

Frequently Asked Questions about Court Case Files in NARA's Atlanta Records Center

1. Why are court case files located at the Atlanta Federal Records Center?

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) provides safe, secure, and economical records storage services for the Federal courts. The Atlanta Federal Records Center (FRC) maintains approximately 1.5 million cubic feet of records for Federal agencies and courts. In Atlanta, we store retired case files for Federal courts located in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee.

2. Why must I get all of my case information from the court before I contact NARA?

NARA cannot provide you with information about the existence or location of a file, because the files belong to the courts. Only the courts maintain lists of case file names, which are then indexed to file numbers and locations. In cooperation with the courts, NARA offers public access services to provide faster retrieval. Without this service, you would have to request a case from the court and then wait for the court to retrieve the file from the Records Center.

3. If I want to review a bankruptcy, civil, or criminal case file, exactly what type of information do I need to know before I call the Atlanta FRC?

Before NARA employees can 'pull' the requested case file for review (or to make copies), we need to have the following information:

Court Location (City)	Location Number
Accession Number	Case File Number
Box Number	Case File Name

If you do not already have this information 'in hand,' you will need to contact the U.S. District or Bankruptcy Court where the case was originally filed. The Clerk's Office for the respective court can provide all necessary information regarding the location of your retired case file. If you do not know the current phone number for the court you need to contact, NARA staff can attempt to assist you in locating that information (just call the Research Department at (404) 763-7474).

Very Important Note: Unfortunately, we **must** have all of the information listed above if we are to locate and 'pull' a case file for you. If the information is incorrect or incomplete, the processing of your request will be delayed.

4. How does NARA retrieve case files for public use?

After a customer collects **all** the required information from a U.S. District or Bankruptcy Court and passes it along to us, NARA staff will use the location information to retrieve your file, finding it among the millions of similar documents stored at the Atlanta FRC. If the case information is missing or erroneous, we will probably not locate the file. If necessary, two different staff members will conduct a search for the file. Sometimes we will also contact the courts for help.

5. What happens if you cannot find my file?

If we cannot find your case file, a member of our Research Department staff will call you, and you must then recheck all of the information with the court.

6. **What are your hours of operation?**

Research Department staff will answer the phones between the hours of 7:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. EST. The Research Room is open to the public between the hours of 7:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m., Monday thru Friday. Appointments to review case files can be scheduled in thirty minute increments anytime between 7:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. (i.e. 7:30, 8:00, 8:30, etc.).

7. **How do I schedule an appointment to come to the Atlanta FRC and personally review my case file?**

To schedule an appointment to review your case file, you will need to contact the Research Department via phone at (404) 763-7474. Before you call, you will need to know the Court Location (City), Accession Number, Box Number, Location Number, Case File Number, and Case File Name for the folder(s) you would like to review. The Research Department staff will take your information, and set up a time when you can come in and review the file.

Very Important Note: Appointments for the next business day **MUST** be scheduled no later than 12:00 p.m. the previous business day. If you call in after 12:00 p.m. to schedule a "Review Appointment," then it will have to be set-up two business days in advance. The Atlanta FRC maintains extensive holdings (in excess of 1.5 million cubic feet of records), and it takes a fair amount of time to locate and 'pull' a particular case file for customer review.

For example, if you called in around 11:30 a.m. on Monday, you could schedule an appointment to review your folder at 7:00 a.m. on **Tuesday**. However, if you called in at 12:30 p.m. on Monday, the earliest time at which you could review your folder would be 7:00 a.m. on **Wednesday**.

8. **How do I get to the Atlanta FRC if I want to review a file?**

The Atlanta FRC is located in East Point, Georgia, between downtown Atlanta and Hartsfield Atlanta Airport. Our address is:

NARA – Southeast Region
1557 St. Joseph Avenue
East Point, GA 30344-2593

By Car

From Interstate 75-85 take GA 166 west to the US29/Fort McPherson/Main Street exit. Bear right at the exit, following the National Archives Center signs, and go south on Main Street (US 29) about a mile. The signs will direct you off Main Street with a right turn at Newnan Avenue. On Newnan, make an immediate left onto St. Joseph Avenue and proceed 1½ blocks to the facility.

By Public Transportation

The facility is served by MARTA, the metropolitan area's rail/bus transportation system. Take MARTA to the East Point Station or the Lakewood Station and take MARTA's bus route 20 for a 5-minute ride to the facility.

9. **What can I expect when I visit the Atlanta FRC?**

Before you visit, we suggest that you confirm that we retrieved your file. Upon arrival, you will check in with security, be issued a visitor's badge, and be escorted to the review area. You may bring only paper and pencil, laptop computers, or portable audio recording devices into the review area. All other items must be placed in a locker or returned to your car. You can order copies made while you wait, if you pay in advance by cash, check, or credit card (there is a \$0.50 charge per page copied). No copies will be made after 3:15

p.m. Eating, drinking, and smoking are not permitted in the review area. There is a snack room with vending machines in the building.

10. Is there a form that I need to fill out if I want to request copies of documents contained in my case file? How can I obtain a copy of the form?

NARA has printed several standard forms that a customer can use to request Bankruptcy Case Files, Civil Case Files, or Criminal Case Files. These forms are very helpful, as they include boxes for location information, packet options, how you would like the information returned to you, payment information, etc. If you would like a copy of one of these standardized request forms, contact our Research Department via phone at (404) 763-7474. One of our staff members would be more than happy to fax, e-mail or mail out a copy of the form you need.

While we suggest that customers submit their request on one of our standard forms, you are not required to do so. A handwritten or typed request can be submitted, but you will have to include:

- a) Name.
- b) Daytime Telephone Number.
- c) Current address.
- d) Basic Information (Court Location (City), Accession Number, Box Number, Location Number, Case File Number, Case File Name).
- e) For civil or criminal case files, which can be very large, please include the docket numbers for the subsections that you need copied.
- f) Indicate whether you need the copies sent out via fax or mail. Note that 'certified' copies can **only** be sent out by mail (United States Postal Service (USPS) or Common Courier).
- g) Indicate who and where the information will be mailed or faxed to. The current mailing address could be "Same." For faxes, be sure to include "Attention To" information. NARA will make up to three attempts to fax information to the number on the request. After that, the packet will be mailed to the indicated address.
- h) What package (\$10 or \$35) you require. Please indicate "Option A" or "Option B" if applicable.
- i) If you need your copies 'certified,' indicate this and remember to add \$6.00 to the cost of the order.
- j) For packets being mailed out, we offer Regular Mail and Federal Express service. Regular Mail is included in the posted rate. If you need your documents sent out through Federal Express, please indicate this on your request, and remember to include an additional \$7.50 to cover the cost of mailing.
- k) Include your payment (credit card only via fax). Please make money orders or personal checks payable to "National Archives Trust Fund." For credit card payments, include the type of card, cardholder's name, the card number, and the expiration date.

Please remember to write legibly if you submit a handwritten request. If our staff cannot make out important information, servicing of your request may be delayed.

11. What type of payment options does NARA accept? Who would I make my money order or personal check out to?

NARA accepts all major credit cards, as well as money orders, and personal checks. However, please be aware that we can only accept personal checks in amounts up to \$100.00. If you prefer to pay via check or money order, please make them payable to "National Archives Trust Fund." Requests submitted by fax or e-mail will have to be paid for via credit card. Requests that are submitted by mail can be paid for via credit card, money order, or personal check.

12. **How do I submit a request for documents from a case file?**

Individuals can submit formal requests for information by fax, e-mail, or mail (USPS or Common Courier). **Please be aware that we CANNOT accept formal requests via phone. This rule is designed to protect the privacy of American citizens, and we cannot make exceptions.** Our Research Department staff will be happy to attempt to answer any question that you might have over the phone, but the formal request for documents must still be submitted in writing.

If you choose to fax or e-mail in a request for documents from a case file, you will need to pay via credit card (be sure to include the name of the cardholder, card type, card number, and expiration date). If you choose to submit your request by mail, you can pay via credit card, money order, or personnel check (personnel checks up to \$100.00 will be accepted). Money orders and checks should be made out to "National Archives Trust Fund." If you have all the required information, you can fax your request to (404) 763-7815, e-mail the request to atlanta.court@nara.gov, or mail the request to:

NARA – Southeast Region
1557 St. Joseph Avenue
East Point, GA 30344-2593

13. **What type of copy services do you offer? What is the cost for each service?**

Currently, NARA offers a variety of standard copy services.

Bankruptcy Case Files

Option A – Bankruptcy Package (\$10.00) – The basic bankruptcy copy package contains only the following documents: 1) Order of Discharge or Order of Dismissal, 2) Debtor's Voluntary Petition, 3) Schedules D, E, and F, 4) a copy of the Mailing List Matrix.

Option B – Entire Bankruptcy Case (\$35.00) – All documents in the case file will be copied, up to a **70 page limit**. Subsequent pages will be subject to a \$0.50 per page charge. You will be notified by telephone if your request exceeds the 70 page limit and will be given further options at that time, including a request for prepayment based upon the estimated volume to be copied.

Civil Case Files

Entire Civil Case (\$35.00) – Copies up to a **70 page limit** will be billed at a flat rate of \$35.00. Subsequent pages will be subject to a \$0.50 per page charge. Please note that an entire case can include hundreds or thousands of pages, and costs can be prohibitive. We recommend that the requester either: 1) arranges for the case to be returned to the court for review or 2) visits our facility to review the case. You will be notified by telephone of the approximate number of pages pertaining to your request. If you decide to have NARA staff perform the reproduction services, all costs must be prepaid before copies are made.

Criminal Case Files

Option A – Criminal Package (\$10.00) – Consists of the following documents only: 1) Judgment and Commitment, or Judgment and Probation/Commitment Order, 2) Indictment or information. You will only receive copies of the documents filed in the case and a list of any documents that are missing. All questions concerning the file contents must be directed to the U.S. District Court.

Option B – Entire Criminal Case (\$35.00) – Copies up to a **70 page limit** will be billed at a flat rate of \$35.00. Subsequent pages will be subject to a \$0.50 per page charge. Please note that an entire case can include hundreds or thousands of pages, and costs can be prohibitive. We recommend that the requester either: 1) arranges for the case to be returned to the court for review or 2) visits our facility to review the case. You will be

notified by telephone of the approximate number of pages pertaining to your request. If you decide to have the NARA staff perform the reproduction services, all costs must be prepaid before copies are made.

Very Important Note: Please remember that the listed costs **do not** include the additional charges that will be incurred if you either need your documents certified or returned to you via Federal Express Overnight service. Certification, of any size package, will add **\$6.00** to the cost of the order. Having your copies sent to you using Federal Express will incur an additional **\$7.50** charge.

14. Should I order a package or an entire file?

You need to discuss your options with your attorney or the party who asked you for the case file information. NARA provides packages of selected documents that suffice for some reasons, but we cannot make the decision for you. Our Research Department staff is not trained in legal matters, and we are reluctant to offer advice that might prove inaccurate. If you have additional questions, addressing them to the Clerk of the U.S. District or Bankruptcy Court where the case was filed might be a good place to start.

15. What if my file contains more than 70 pages?

If your file contains more than 70 pages, a member of our Research Department staff will count the pages, and then call you to explain your options. One option is an additional payment of \$0.50 per page for each page over 70 pages. Alternatively, a staff member might suggest eliminating some pages.

16. Does NARA offer copy services for all types of retired bankruptcy case files?

Unfortunately, the answer would be “No.” The “Option A” and “Option B” packets that NARA offers to the public only cover Chapter 7 and Chapter 13 personal bankruptcies. Chapter 11 filings, for businesses, tend to be much more extensive, and are not covered under our basic services. If you need to locate documents out of a Chapter 11 case, you have three options.

- a) If you happen to live in or near the Atlanta metropolitan area, you can schedule a time to visit the facility and review the Chapter 11 files in person. Under those circumstances, copies will cost \$0.50 a page, and they will be made by one of our Research Department clerks.
- b) If you are not located near the Atlanta FRC, you can contract with a private copy service. They can then schedule an appointment to come in, review the file, and copy the necessary documents. You should be aware that costs may be prohibitive, depending on the volume of material that you need copied. NARA staff cannot recommend a particular private copy service, but you might contact the appropriate court for suggestions or potential references.
- c) If neither of these options will work with your schedule, you will need to contact the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the city where the case was initially filed. Their Clerk can request that the documents be returned to the court, and you can make arrangements to review the materials, and have them copied at that location.

17. What if I need my documents certified? Is there an additional charge for this service?

Our Research Department staff can certify your documents if it is necessary. Please note that “certification” – when used in this context – **does not** refer to the “Certified Mail” Service offered by the USPS. Instead, certification consists of NARA stamping and sealing your packet of documents with an official seal and ribbon. In short, NARA is verifying that the material was copied direct from the requested case file. Certified documents can only be returned to you by mail (either USPS or Federal Express). Pages

have to be faxed individually, and the process of separating them for faxing invalidates the sealed certification.

If you need a set of documents certified, there is an additional \$6.00 charge. This charge is in addition to any other charges associated with the basic copy service.

18. **Do I need to include a prepaid, self-addressed mailing envelope with my mailed in request?**

You do not need to include a prepaid, self-addressed mailing envelope with your request. Despite the fact that some of the older versions of NARA request forms (which are still in circulation on the web) mentioned the need to include a prepaid envelope, this is no longer required. The cost of returning copies to you via USPS 1st Class Mail is already factored into our standard copy charges. Remember that if you want your copies shipped out via Federal Express instead of the USPS, then there is an additional charge for that service.

19. **Does NARA offer any sort of express or overnight mail service?**

Yes. The Research Department can send your documents out using Federal Express Overnight service. This additional feature will add \$7.50 to the cost of your order. You should be aware that – if the folder to be copied is particularly lengthy – Federal Express may charge an additional fee upon delivery (because FedEx package cost is based on weight). However, for the vast majority of case files NARA copies, the basic \$7.50 charge is sufficient.

An additional option, assuming that you included a prepaid United Parcel Service (UPS) envelope with the initial inquiry that you mailed to NARA, would be to have the documents returned to you through that service. **However, please note that we cannot send documents out using Airborne, DHL, or any Common Courier other than Federal Express or UPS.** Trucks from the USPS, Federal Express, and UPS deliver boxes to the Atlanta FRC daily, and their drivers all have the ability to pick-up outgoing mail. Since NARA does not have current shipping contracts with them, other Common Couriers **do not** visit our facility to pick-up outgoing mail.

Customers should also remember that, although sending the items out via Federal Express or UPS will save a few days of 'transit time,' it will still take Research Department staff up to five business days to locate the records, copy them, verify payment, and package the documents that you need.

20. **How long does it normally take NARA to locate and return requested information from a case file?**

Under **normal circumstances**, NARA personnel will attempt to service all requests within five business days of receipt. However, please note that NARA **does not** guarantee a five day turnaround; extenuating circumstances can occasionally lead to unanticipated delays. Remember also that the five day estimate does not include the time it takes for the USPS or other Common Courier to deliver your request to our door. Similarly, it will take additional time to return the information to you via the USPS or Common Courier. This 'turn around time' is based on the large volume of inquiries that we receive daily and the relatively small number of personnel that we have available to service requests. We do understand that obtaining information from a bankruptcy, civil, or criminal folder is very important to citizens, and NARA staff always do their very best to 'turn around' requests as quickly as is humanly possible. NARA's Records Centers are tasked with providing both Federal agencies and the general public with "Ready access to essential evidence," and we take this mission very seriously.

Very Important Note: The fastest way to obtain copies from a case file is for you to fax your request to us, and request that NARA fax the file copy back to you.

21. **Should I call the Atlanta FRC to check on the status of my order?**

We ask that customers please wait five business days after they have sent in a request before calling to check on the status of their case file. This is not because NARA seeks to avoid contact with the public – far from it! American citizens are our valued customers; they also pay our salaries. While we would like to keep every customer ‘in the loop,’ attempting to check status prior to the point at which five business days have elapsed takes up precious time and slows down the processing of **all** customer requests. In addition, we also ask that you please not call to confirm that we have received your fax transmission. Modern fax machines should print a ‘confirmation sheet’ if the fax went through successfully, and multiple customers calling to confirm receipt only slows down the processing of everyone’s order. If you mailed your order, please be so kind as to allow approximately three business days for the USPS to deliver it to our door (plus the five business days that it will normally take for us to service your request).

22. **It has been more than five business days since I faxed in my request, and I have still not heard anything from NARA. What could be causing the delay?**

Several things can slow down a response. The most common reason for a delayed response would be if we received inaccurate, incomplete, or illegible location information. If we have to research a location or return a request to you for additional information, this can result in a substantial delay. Similarly, if the name on a case file does not match the name on the case you requested, processing can be delayed. Finally, if payment is not included (or a credit card is declined), then a request would have to be resubmitted. If any of the circumstances listed above occur, a member of the Research Department staff will attempt to contact you via phone or mail. In addition, please remember – assuming that you elected to have your information mailed out via the USPS or Common Courier – that it will take a certain number of days to have the information delivered to your door. NARA has no control over shipping times, and this additional time is not included in our ‘five business day’ estimate of the period it will take to service your request.

23. **What can I do now that more than five business days have elapsed?**

If NARA has had your request information for more than five business days and you have not yet received any type of response, please feel free to contact our Research Department staff at (404) 763-7474. **Please note that we do ask that customers wait five complete business days before calling to check on their order. Prior to that amount of time elapsing, our staff cannot provide any additional information regarding the status of your request.**

However, once five business days have elapsed, our Research Department staff will be happy to attempt to follow up on the status of your order. Most likely, you will be asked to fax in a duplicate copy of the initial order that you submitted. Our staff will stamp your fax “Second Request,” and we will assign a senior member of our General Reference staff to investigate why your copies have been delayed. Although we cannot make any promises regarding the amount of time this will take – simply because every case is different – NARA generally attempts to resolve “Second Request” situations within a 24 hour time frame.

Please remember that this does not necessarily mean that you will have your information ‘in hand’ within 24 hours. If the documents need to be shipped via mail, you will still have to allow for the time it take to have the items delivered to your door. If the problem turned out to be that there was something missing from the initial request (examples might include insufficient payment for services requested or a request for “faxed” copies that did not include a working fax number where we could return the information to the customer), the delay – even after a “Second Request” search was initiated – could be substantial.

24. **If I would like to speak to a Supervisor, who should I contact?**

The Research Department at the Atlanta FRC is part of our “General Reference (GR) Program.” The Supervisor for the GR Program can be contacted at atlanta.reference@nara.gov. If, after a reasonable amount of time has elapsed, you have not received a response from NARA, please be so kind as to leave a message on his automated voice mail at (404) 763-7062.

Very Important Note: We ask that customers do not attempt to ‘short circuit’ the normal request procedure by submitting your request directly to the GR Supervisor. This will **not** save any time. In fact, it may cause additional delays as you will have to eventually contact the Research Department and file your request through normal channels. **Every** single request for information is important – both to the customer and NARA – and we have to handle inquiries in the order in which they were received. Doing otherwise would unfairly penalize citizens who submitted their requests according to our published rules and procedures.

25. **I HAVE to have this information today. Is there ANYTHING that I can do to get it right now?**

Regrettably, the answer to this question is most likely “No.” Under normal circumstances, it will take NARA approximately **five business days** to process a request for copies from a bankruptcy, civil, or criminal case file. However, there may be two potential options that you can explore:

- a) If you are located in or near the Atlanta, Georgia, area, you could consider visiting the facility as a “Walk-In Appointment.” Visiting the facility on a “Walk-In” basis must be done between the hours of 7:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m., Monday thru Friday. Should you choose to visit the facility in person, you will still need to have all the basic information (Court Location (City), Accession Number, Box Number, Location Number, Case File Number, and Case Name) ‘in hand’ so that our Research Department staff can assist you. You also need to be aware that searching the warehouse for your particular file folder will take time. Expect to wait approximately one hour while a member of our General Reference staff locates the case file that you need to access. After the file has been brought to the review area, you can page through the folder to locate the documents that you need. DO NOT remove anything from the case file. A member of our Research Department staff will be available to make copies of any document that you require (at a cost of \$0.50 per page).
- b) Another potential option – particularly if you are not located near Atlanta, Georgia – would be to contract with a private copy service. A number of private copy services in the Atlanta area routinely send representatives out to the review area of the Records Center to copy case files for paying customers. You should be aware that the cost can be prohibitive if you choose to use a private copy service. It is also possible that it may still take them a number of days to get you the information that you need. NARA staff cannot recommend a particular private copy service, but you might contact the appropriate court for suggestions or potential references.

Very Important Note: Please remember that NARA is a government agency and, as such, is **not** affiliated with any private copy service. We cannot vouch for the quality of their service, nor accept responsibility for the accuracy of their work.